

Library Square is one bookend to an exciting story?: Mayor



By Brock Weir

If the Aurora Armoury's future as a campus to Niagara College's Canadian Food & Wine Institute is a bookend on downtown revitalization, everything in between is held up by the bookend on the other end of the shelf: Library Square.

This was the view offered to local business leaders last month at Mayor Tom Mrakas' inaugural Annual Mayor's Lunch hosted by the Aurora Chamber of Commerce.

As The Auroran reported last week, Mayor Mrakas used the occasion to share optimism over ongoing renovation work taking place at the historic Aurora Armoury, the former home of the Queen's York Rangers, situated at the northeast corner of Town Park.

Bringing a campus of the Canadian Food & Wine Institute is a move which will move the long-stated goal of Downtown Revitalization forward, he said, working hand-in-hand with the redevelopment of Library Square.

These [are] bookends to an exciting story: the story of our downtown revitalization, said Mayor Mrakas, referencing recently-released artistic renderings of what residents might find at Library Square once redevelopment is complete. The outdoor space and the indoor space that we have planned are truly exceptional in both design and function. The outdoor space will feature a splash pad in the summer and a refrigerated rink in the winter, and will be easily accessible from the Library, 22 Church Street, and Public Transit. Library Square will offer a stunning backdrop to concerts, to music festivals, public art displays, parades, performances, pop-up shops, food truck festivals and cafes.

The Square is being designed in a way that will be visible from the main street to draw people into the activities taking place there. The proposed performance hall is yet another destination for residents and visitors and will allow us to host some truly exceptional events. With retractable seating in the hall, the space can be used for theatrical performances, concerts, comedy shows, movie screenings, ceremonies, recitals as well as banquets, trade shows, lectures and large meetings.

This space, he added, could accommodate 250 people seated theatre-style, or 160 banquet-style.

With two new hotels in town, I see us being able to promote this flexible space that businesses and organizations looking to host workshops, banquets and trade shows [can use], he continued. In addition to all these possibilities, we'll also be able to draw the arts community with the state of the art performing arts studio and a multipurpose visual arts room. These areas also have endless possibilities and can be used for everything from dance and fitness classes, language classes and courses. With the modern design of the addition, the stunning heritage and history of 22 Church Street, the location will also be an ideal space for weddings and special events.

When sitting as a Councillor during the 2014 - 2018 term, Mayor Mrakas was a proponent of establishing an Aurora Christmas Market, an idea which has taken root over the past two years at Town Hall, held in conjunction with the Town's annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Once Library Square is complete, he said he sees this as the future home for such Christmas markets, offering families the chance to skate on the outdoor rink while watching the large evergreen outside the Church Street School be lit up to mark the start of the Holiday Season. From there, families can grab a coffee or hot chocolate while listening to carollers before heading over to Yonge and Wellington, closed to pedestrians, to make way for the Christmas market.

Mayor Mrakas said that is just one example of the kind of downtown he envisions for Aurora, featuring pedestrian-only events once a month in the summer that allow for on-street live concerts and events to attract residents and visitors, give area businesses a chance to sell ? and a chance to shine ? and make the Town a ?more attractive place to work and set up business.?

?We have all seen the power a well-designed public space can have, particularly when it comes to rejuvenating downtowns. We have seen it happen with our neighbours to the north in Newmarket's Riverwalk Commons is a real community hub and the surrounding restaurants and businesses are thriving. Aurora has the potential to create something not only equally exciting but excitingly unique to our community.

?The combination of the indoor and outdoor space, and Library Square's proximity to GO Transit, York Region Transit, and Yonge Street, have the potential to put Library Square on another level and make it a destination not only in Aurora but in York Region. Between the hotels, the team-building offerings at the Armoury, and the new building at Library Square, we're able to offer something unique to the business community that will set us apart. A new place to meet clients over coffee, or host a trade show or a conference in the new building, businesses, residents and visitors will be excited to take advantage, everything that Library Square is going to bring to our community.?